

Salah Bayaziddi, US Representative, Komala Party of Iranian Kurdistan

Following the Iranian revolution in 1979, Salah Bayaziddi as a young sympathizer joined the Komala Party and became an activist in the Kurdish struggle against the oppression of the new Islamic regime. In 1982, regime security forces arrested him. Mr. Bayaziddi survived over two years of torture and solitary confinement for his beliefs in a free and democratic Iran based on equality for all ethnic and religious groups including Kurds.

Following Mr. Bayaziddi's release from prison, he was under strict and constant watch by regime security and intelligence agencies. From 1984 to 1990, he was deprived the right to study, the right to work and the right to travel outside Iran.

In 1990, Mr. Bayaziddi escaped Iran through the mountains of Turkey. In Ankara, he applied for and was accepted as a new Canadian immigrant through the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

In 1991, Mr. Bayaziddi resettled in Toronto. He has been active on behalf of Kurdish causes and human rights in Iran for over 35 years.

Following Komala Party's 14th Congress in 2013 and its 15th Congress in 2017, Mr. Bayaziddi was elected to a leadership position as a member of its Central Committee. He has served as Komala's Representative to the United States since September 2018.

Mr. Bayaziddi received his BA in Political Science from York University, in Toronto, and an MA in International Relations from Brock University in Canada.

A Kurdish Voice from Iran: The Komala Party

2019 marks the 40th anniversary of the Islamic Revolution in Iran, when protests in the streets brought down the Shah's government, and then Iranian clerics commandeered the revolution from the people. Then, as now, Kurdish parties in Iran stood against the Islamists that came to power in 1979 and demonstrated against the clerics across Kurdish areas of the country including in cities like Sanandij. Iran's Kurds have always been at the forefront of the fight against the regime. That regime would become entangled in wars, support terrorism against the US, build nuclear and ballistic missile programs, and cause the death of millions of Iranians and non-Iranians alike.

As the US government counters Iran's presence as a regional aggressor, in places like Syria and Yemen, it is more critical than ever to assert that Iran must end its threatening behavior around the world and against its own people, including by halting its nuclear activities. Komala views the US government's recent decision to designate the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) as a major step in curbing the regime's influence and destructive policies in the Middle East.

The Kurds of Iran and the Komala Party have remained active in the country's opposition movements against the regime and have stood for democratic change in Iran since 1979. Komala urges the United States and the international community to call for Iranian domestic and foreign policies based on peaceful coexistence and international and regional cooperation.

Mission

Founded in 1969 by a group of students and intellectuals in Iran, the Komala Party has a long-standing reputation for striving for cooperation among a plurality of minority groups in Iran.

Today, Komala is a force for democratic change in Iran. The national protests across Iran that began over a year ago started in Mashhad. The uprising then turned political, first in the Kurdish city of Kermanshah. Political slogans against the regime began in the Kurdish areas and spread nationwide. For the past year, Komala has become a key partner with other democratic opposition groups against the regime both inside Iran and outside it.

Komala stands for a democratic, secular and Federal Iran, where the rights of all Iranians including the Kurds are respected. We advocate for a broad-based democratic coalition in Iran and solidarity among ethnic and religious minorities marginalized by the Iranian regime.

To achieve a vision for Iran based on those key tenants, Komala joined others as founders of an

umbrella organization of Iranian ethnic, opposition groups, called *the Congress of Nationalities for a Federal Iran*. Komala is also one of the founders of a new opposition coalition called *the Solidarity for Freedom and Equality in Iran*.

The Kurds and other minorities in Iran have overwhelmingly faced the tyranny of the regime. Kurds are estimated to constitute nearly half of all political prisoners in the country, and one-fifth of executions in Iran in 2016 concerned Kurdish prisoners, according to a 2017 UN report.

With an enduring reputation for safeguarding the rights of the most vulnerable, Komala has long advocated for a democratic political system in Iran. For example, in 2009, following the rise of the Green Movement in Iran against the regime, the majority of that movement's activists fled to the Kurdish areas of Iran, where they were protected before fleeing the regime for the West.

More recently, seeking to counter terrorist threats in the Middle East, Komala played a role in the war to combat terrorism when its *Peshmerga* forces fought alongside the US-led coalition against Islamic State in Iraq, in Kirkuk province, for sixteen months.

In November, 1979, when the US embassy in Tehran was overrun by Iranian regime sympathizers, Komala stood up against the regime's "second revolution," as Khomeini called it, to take American hostages.

Komala strives for a non-nuclear Iran, which respects the sovereignty of its neighbors and well-being of its people.

The Context

With a population of roughly ten million spread across at least four provinces in Iran, Iranian Kurdish society is one of the largest populations of Kurds in the world. Despite their sizable presence, Kurds have faced formidable barriers to inclusion and acceptance in Iran, including systemized discrimination and violence against the Kurdish areas. The Iranian government, well-known for conflict, has committed significant human rights abuses against Kurds in Iran, and has forcibly excluded Kurds and other minorities from society.

The pattern of arresting, torturing, and imprisoning Kurds in Iran spans decades. Kurds and other religious and ethnic minorities in Iran face an outsized level of politicized violence, especially in the treatment of political prisoners. In day-to-day life, Kurds and other minority groups face discrimination that prevents them from participating in political and cultural life. *Amnesty International* summarized it this way in 2017: "Ethnic minorities, including Ahwazi Arabs, Azerbaijani Turks, Baluchis, Kurds and Turkmen, remained subject to entrenched discrimination, curtailing their access to education, employment, adequate housing and political office." Religious

minorities - Christians, Jews, Sunnis, Sufi Muslims, Baha'is, Zoroastrians, among others - risk imprisonment for religious practices.

Kurdish culture has been deemed “un-Islamic” by Iran’s regime. Neither education systems, nor courts and administration, are conducted in the Kurdish mother tongue. Further, Kurdish students are denied equal access to Iran’s higher education system due to a biased selection process. Indeed, Kurdish areas in Iran are under intense scrutiny and harsher security measures than other areas of the country and receive disproportionately low government services, perpetuating a cycle of underdevelopment and exclusion.

Our Goals and Aims

Komala believes in the inherent right of citizens to coexist peacefully, and for the government in Iran to put individual freedoms, regardless of religion or ethnicity, on the political agenda. Kurds — and all minorities in Iran — deserve access to free and fair elections, and freedom of assembly. Historically, Kurdish society in Iran has been tolerant of and lived peacefully with other religious, sectarian and ethnic groups. We underscore the importance of complete freedom of expression, freedom of the media, and unconditional access by all to the Internet.

We seek a government that ensures basic human rights for every citizen and adheres to the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Equality should extend to every citizen, regardless of gender, religion, or ethnicity; any form of discrimination against women should be eliminated. We also aim for the abolishment of the death penalty.

Above all, Komala stands for and on behalf of the Kurds and other minorities in Iran, whom have historically faced persecution and denial of basic human rights. By promoting an open economy, broadening access to equal educational and employment opportunities, and strengthening human capital, we seek to develop a strong national identity, acknowledging the legitimate aspirations of all of Iran’s citizens. Indeed, Komala and the Kurds of Iran have always been an active and key political movement calling for democratic change in the country.

Komala seeks for Iran’s Kurdistan region and nationally the following key points:

- **A democratic, federal and free Iran, which separates religion and state;**
- **Self-rule for the Kurdish provinces of Iran;**
- **Respect and the establishment of a just rule of law;**
- **Free and fair elections to help promote the wellbeing of all citizens in Iran;**
- **Protection of all ethnic groups and religions in Iran and the safeguarding of their political and cultural rights and heritages;**
- **Equal economic, social and educational opportunities for all minorities in Iran, and**
- **A non-nuclear Iran that is at peace with all its neighbors**